Up and Down the Street

Deseret Research Is Booming Under Sorensons





Above left: Kelly Mower does atomic absorption analysis of mercury samples at Deseret Research Co., whose principals, below, include James L. Sorenson Sr. and James L. Sorenson Jr., foreground, Kirby Mills, left, and James Nelson. Deseret Research also has started aeromagnetic geologic reconnaissance subsidiary which uses light aircraft and ground stations, above right, to provide customers with "real time" reports on the location.

— Tribune Staff Photos by Lynn R. Johnson



Robert H. Woody

Business Editor

When University of Utah business vice president Paul W. Hodson outlined his vision for a University of Utah research park two decades ago, he conjured a sylvan environment of buildings wherein academia, research and business would engage in a creative collaboration that would spawn new technologies, new industries and new jobs.

He could not have dreamed there would be a tangible realization of the vision in an organization headed by a future and then as yet unknown son-in-law.

Such is Deseret Research Co., headed by 35-year-old James L. Sorenson Jr.

Deseret is engaged in a variety of enterprises ranging from chemicals and toxicity testing to aero-magnetic surveys.

Mr. Hodson retired in 1973.

Deseret Research Co. was founded 10 years later — in December 1983 — when the James L. Sorenson family acquired the Utah Biomedical Test Laboratories from the University of Utah Research Institute for $1.1 million.

UBTL is now a division of Deseret Research.

James L. Sorenson Sr. is now a rather celebrated Utah businessman. A former pharmaceuticals salesman, he was one of the founders of Deseret Pharmaceutical. He later founded Sorenson Research Co., which was acquired in 1980 by the Chicago-based Abbot Laboratories.

Deseret Research is headquartered in a three-level 50,000-square-foot building constructed in 1971 for study of implanted artificial hearts under a grant from the National Institute of Health.

When the Sorensons bought the business two years ago, the laboratory had 80 employees and annual revenues of about $2.9 million. Deseret Research now employs 160. It expects to do $10 million in business this year compared to $6.5 million last year.

About 60 percent of the employees are college graduates. The ranks include 12 doctorates with the remainder holding either masters or bachelors of science degrees.

Among master holders: Mr. Sorenson Jr. who earned an accounting degree in 1975 two years after he married Mr. Hodson's daughter Elizabeth.

Deseret is an extraordinary company. On the bottom level are the sheep, the mice, the dogs, the rabbits used for biomedical testing. On the upper level are the array of machines for chemical analyses.

All very diverse it would seem, but in fact, very synergistic, says Jeffrey Orth, formerly with the U.'s artificial organ program, and now senior electronics engineer at UBTL.

The chemical laboratory, for example, is as capable of testing chemicals for environmental hygiene as for geochemical analysis for prospectors, as for testing urine specimens for drugs of abuse.

The latter has major potential, according to Mr. Sorenson Jr., as more and more companies make employee drug testing mandatory.

Basically Deseret can provide a precise and accurate confirmation analysis when a first — but not necessarily exacting test — may only indicate drug abuse.

All Deseret employees incidentally will be tested once procedures are put in place, Mr. Sorenson said.

UBLT is headed by Dr. James Nel-

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